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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the findings of a review of 35 articles on the perceptions of students with disabilities regarding student placement. Results of the review indicate students with special education needs vastly prefer general education classroom placement to any form of separateness. Students generally report reluctance about leaving the classroom, although they do perceive advantages to receiving the assistance of special educator help within the classroom. Even though the general education classroom might be a preference, there is also a substantial body of literature where students report lack of attention to their special needs or even negative teacher and age-mate interactions. In comparison, special education resource room programs and classroom settings have been viewed as scattered, unclear, and disorganized. Some groups of students with specific exceptionalities have clear preferences or see advantages to a separate special education approach including students with hearing impairments, some students with emotional disturbances/behavior disorders, and intermediate-age students with learning disabilities. The report concludes that the primary implication to be drawn from the review is that inquiry must be made into students' placement preferences and that students must be included in the placement decision-making process. (Contains 62 references.) (CR)

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What Do Special Education Students Think of School Placements?

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Abstract.

What Do Special Education Students Think of School Placements?

Literature is reviewed describing the need to ask students who are to receive special education about their school placement preferences. The review highlights that such inquiry is supported as a means to increase students' participation, motivation, and achievement. Yet, there is a paucity of research describing students' perceptions and preferences. The review describes what is known from all literature which does bear on this question and general findings of preferences for general education classrooms. Yet, drawbacks to such placements are also identified. Implications include the need to ask students what their preferences are, the advisability of this inquiry as determined through federal legislative guidance, and the importance of preparing future educators for being aware of student preferences

What Do Special Education Students Think of School Placements?

Controversies and debates about separate or general education classroom placement of students with disabilities abound (e.g. McLeskey & Waldron, 1995; Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, Deno, & Fuchs, 1995), at the same time as classroom placements of special education students increase (McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1999). Amidst all the discussions and points of view, curiously, the views of students themselves are rarely inquired. Surely, the perspectives of students would be regarded as weighing in the placement decision, but there is only limited literature investigating which placements students prefer and the bases of these preferences.

It is noteworthy that this absence stands in contrast to the recommendation within federal guidance. For instance, in a 1981 interpretation of individualized education program (IEP) requirements issued by the U.S. Department of Education, it is noted that, in the regulation, IEP participants can include "the child, where appropriate" (p. 5465). The Department's interpretation is, "Generally, a handicapped child should attend the IEP meeting whenever the parents decide that it is appropriate for the child to do so," and "the parents and agency should encourage older handicapped children [particularly those at the secondary school level] to participate in their IEP meetings" (Assistance to States for Education of Handicapped Children: Interpretation, 1981, p. 5467). Bos and Vaughn (1994) contend that, "in practice many students with learning and emotional handicaps do not attend these meetings" (p. 13).

Why should it be important for students to have this participation and indicate their preferences? Bos and Vaughn (1994) assert that such participation "assists them in developing a commitment to learning and helps them develop a sense of responsibility and control over the decisions made" (p. 13). Watson (1996) maintains that such participation would increase the students' intrinsic motivation. This could contribute to students' engaging and enjoying school experiences, since students' perceptions and beliefs influence their interest and persistence in learning (Wittrock, 1986).

Arguments are even more forceful for simply inquiring of special education students about their placement preferences. Numerous contributions to these arguments include Tymitz-Wolf's

(1984) statement, "Meaningful intervention might prove to be more successful if it takes children's own sense of apprehension into account" (p. 166). Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn (1997) have found that children even as young as 7 and 8 years old have distinct ideas about their classroom learning, and these perceptions can significantly affect their motivation to learn--maximizing their engagement and achievement.

The need to make this inquiry of students with disabilities is coupled with the need to involve students generally in educational decision-making. Schumm, Vaughn, and Saumell (1992) comment that students' educational preferences are, in fact, communicated to teachers--both overtly and covertly. It might be presumed that student rejection of particular instructional practices would discourage teachers' subsequent use. Schumm and Vaughn (1994) further declare such inquiry holds promise for improving educational practice. If teachers could understand students' perceptions, that would provide insight into their own teaching practices, and students would be more likely to be motivated and to learn. Knowledge of student's preferences could assist in engaging at-risk learners (Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, & Gordon, 1993). Gibboney (1994), also maintains that a classroom which values giving students the opportunity to make choices develops students' interest. Many students are bored, Gibboney notes, with excessive teacher talk and decision-making.

Additional reasons for including students' participation in educational decisions affecting them include:

-overcoming the generation gap between adolescents and adults;

-improving the climate of relationships in the hallways, lunchroom, and playground;

-helping to resolve conflicts among students and between students and the adult educators;

-enhancing the self-esteem and self-confidence of students...;

-creating a democratic and human school community in which the school becomes everybody's house (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992).

-children as young as 7 and 8 years have distinct ideas about their classroom learning and

can provide researchers with useful information about the approaches to learning that are most effective for them;

-students' perceptions of classroom activity can significantly affect their motivation to learn (Erlbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997, p. 477).

What, particularly, about students with disabilities? First, it needs to be noted that in general education classrooms there may be fear and awkwardness among these students and other classroom pupils, and increasing students' participation may provide ways to break down these barriers (Asch, 1989). On the other hand, without special education students' sense of participation, "some individuals may substitute anti-social, aggressive, or destructive behaviors, or seek inappropriate gratification, and... learned helplessness" (Garner & Sandow, 1995, p. 3).

The Lack of Students' Input

Identifying the Literature

In order to identify all pertinent literature relating to special education students' views of school placement, the authors began with an ERIC search. Using keyword=(Student Attitude) and (*name of exceptionality*) was the most productive keyword search. The authors then read the article and located relevant references cited in the article (Cooper, 1989). This procedure identified 28 useful articles, chapters, or papers. Following Cooper's suggestion for locating "fugitive literature (1989, p. 60), likely authorities on students' views in each of the exceptionality areas were identified by locating presenters of similar topics or university faculty at research institutions in exceptionality areas in the conference programs of two annual conferences of the Council for Exceptional Children. Letters were sent to at least two such individuals exceptionality area presenting the bibliography so far developed and requesting any additional literature that they might be aware of. Additionally, letters were sent to the presidents of each of the exceptionality-specific CEC divisions, all board members of the Teacher Education Division-Council for Exceptional Children, and other prominent researchers in the field. Of the 138 requests sent, 33 responded. Nine of these suggested additional people to contact, 7 supplied articles or additional references previously not found, and the rest commented that the bibliography supplied to them appeared

complete or they were not aware of any other sources. Requests to two e-mail discussion groups (SPED Talk and LD-List) produced no useful results. Thus, these efforts to assure a complete review of pertinent literature address Cooper's (1989) admonition to find literature via a major abstracting service, informal communications, and the bibliographies of past research and reviews.

Articles and papers which are relevant to special education students' views ranged from well-designed quantitative studies to anecdotal reports, but the majority were qualitative studies of one to an undesignated number of students. The exceptionality addressed in 27 of these articles and papers was learning disabilities--by far the most. Only a few papers were found about each of the other exceptionalities, including only one for physical disabilities (Asch, 1989) and none related to students with communication disorders. Because most reports were not quantitative, the resulting review attempts to summarize and highlight areas of consistent findings.

General Education Classroom (Non-Disabled) Students

Interestingly, although the articles describing the classroom preferences of students with disabilities are sparse, literature on non-disabled students is sparse as well. Yet, Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, and Gordon (1993) have found that students do have distinct opinions and preferences about their educational programming which need to be considered when school personnel make educational decisions. They also note that teachers cannot camouflage their own feelings, for students are highly aware of teachers' behavior and have distinct opinions about it. Weinstein (1983), in the only comprehensive review of literature about classroom students' perceptions, describes the classroom as the "teachers' native culture" (p. 306)--not the students'--and students must learn to master this as if it were a foreign culture. However, when students are given the opportunity to register their input, they have been found to be quite capable of making decisions and providing sound reasons for their positions (Rafferty & Leinenbach, 1996). Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) also point out that teachers' attempts at changes can falter when students "intentionally or unconsciously sabotage" (p. 330) those attempts.

Within the existing literature, there is agreement about the legitimacy of students' impressions of the classroom. Weinstein (1983), asserts that students are "active interpreters of

classroom reality and... they draw inferences about the causes and effects of behavior" (p. 288), as shown by a number of studies. While students are comparable to teachers in determining relative abilities of classmates, it may also be that "children's views and adults' views of classroom reality may not be synonymous" (p. 288). Agreeing with others, Weinstein observes that teachers may not adeptly camouflage their feelings, for "it is possible that students are accurately perceiving teacher behavior" (p. 291). Students are quite sensitive to behaviors that teachers display toward classmates, including highly subtle differences. Based on these interpretations, students infer teachers' expectations, and "students' own expectations for themselves... closely matched the teachers' expectations" (p. 302).

Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, and Gordon (1993) concur about students' awareness of teacher behavior and the likelihood of their forming opinions about it. Students, Vaughn, Schumm, and Kouzekanani (1993) assert, "are knowledgeable and sensitive judges" (p. 545). They are "surprisingly knowledgeable about teacher behavior, particularly differential teacher treatments of other students" (Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, & Gordon, 1993, p. 88). Lynas (1986) had a similar finding when comparing treatments of deaf and non-deaf pupils. Babad, Bernieri, and Rosenthal (1991) found this to be true even in very young children--they could make accurate detections, even when teachers thought they were covering their actual feelings.

Why have students not been asked? Weinstein (1983) comments that students have generally been viewed by educators as the "passive recipients" of instruction (p. 287). Even in the school reform literature, students' views have not been sought (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). In a particularly critical statement, Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) contend that students have typically been regarded:

> As products of the educational system (not yet responsible citizens) who need to be controlled or protected, or as consumers who occasionally wish to express their reactions and preferences. Seldom have consultants, educators, or parents viewed students as full-fledged, organizational members who do, can, or should participate in school planning, problem-solving, or decision making (p. 330).

In contrast, "most educational research has focused on teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and skills related to meeting the needs of diverse learners.... Yet relatively little emphasis has been placed on students' thinking, despite consensus about the importance of students' perceptions" (Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, & Gordon, 1993, p. 88; Vaughn, Schumm, & Kouzekanani, 1993).

Some writers have been specific in their search for research revealing students' views. Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, and Daugherty (1993) comment that, in addition to the few studies evaluating students' perceptions of educational practice, "No studies have examined middle and high school students' preferences for the types of adaptations that teachers are encouraged to make" (p. 107). Babad, Bernieri, and Rosenthal (1991) add: "We have not come across a study employing children as 'objective' observers or judges of teachers other than their own" (p. 215). Therefore, we know relatively little about students' views of either teaching approaches or peer life in classrooms (Weinstein, 1983).

Students with Disabilities

In addition to the arguments cited above for considering students' perceptions, additional arguments specific to including the perceptions of students with disabilities as educational placement decisions are being made include Brantlinger's, "It is not possible to know how it feels to be in special education unless one has personally experienced being there" (1994, p. 404). Further, Aaroe and Nelson (n.d.) relate students' views of acceptability of a treatment to the treatment's effectiveness. Therefore, practices which are regarded, by the recipients, as more acceptable "result in better treatment compliance, less attrition, greater satisfaction, and eventually more positive behavioral changes" (p. 13). And, Klingner (1998) reiterates, "Students have distinct ideas about which educational model they prefer and why" (p. 2). In short, student perceptions are significant variables in determining program success (Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 1995). Additionally, Vaughn, Schumm, and Kouzekanani (1993) have found that students with learning disabilities are like their classmates in that they are aware of differential treatment teachers make toward them--even when teachers feel they have concealed their real feelings.

Yet, students with disabilities are rarely included in decisions about their education, their placement, and approaches to be used. Albinger (1995) points to the little consideration that is given even to the labels that are used with children or their feelings about special education placement.

Researchers in studies pertaining to students with disabilities consistently search for related studies and seem to be consistently disappointed in the dearth of such studies. Wade and Moore (1993) refer to the "almost total lack" of literature focusing on students with special educational needs' viewpoints (p. viii). Ware (in press) states that "student accounts of special education remain outside the knowledge tradition of special education." (p. 7). Aaroe and Nelson (n.d.) state flatly: "There is a dearth of research" (p. 3). Reid and Button (1995) state:

> We have studied them, planned for them, educated them, and erased them. We have not listened to their voices.... It is ironic that in special education, a field devoted to improving the quality of life for people with disabilities, we have almost no acquaintance with these people in our literature (p. 602).

And, again, "Few investigators have interviewed students with disabilities in order to hear from them, to give them voice" (p. 607). This absence is specifically noted in regard to their perceptions of special educational placements, suggesting that "personal damage" may result from some of these placements (Reid & Button, 1995, p. 612).

The lack of inquiry of students' perspectives on placement in school applies to each type of disability. In 1974, Jones could find very few studies of students who have mental retardation (MR), and there appear to be only three since that time (i.e., Brantlinger, 1994; MacMillan, Widaman, Balow, Hemsley, & Little, 1992; Tymitz-Wolf, 1984). Brantlinger (1994) asserts the appropriateness of making inquiry of those who have been the recipients of schools' special education services, but notes the "dearth of information about classified students' attitudes toward special education" (p. 386). MacMillan, Widaman, Balow, Hemsley, and Little (1992) comment, "We are surprised by the dearth of research on school attitudes of mildly handicapped students" (p. 40). Regarding students with hearing impairments, Foster (1989) comments that most research

involves application of measures "to deaf students" but little examines "from the perspective of the deaf student" (p. 39), and that, "historically, public policy and educational services for people with disabilities have been formulated, implemented and evaluated with little or no client or student involvement" (p. 40). Regarding students with emotional disturbance/behavioral disorders (ED/BD), "very little data examining... student satisfaction in programs for behaviorally disordered youth exist" (Leone, Luttig, Zlotlow, & Trickett, 1990, p. 55).

The complaint is heard more frequently in regard to students who have specific learning disabilities (LD). Vaughn and Bos (1987)--the writers who developed strategies for students to participate in writing their own IEPs--lament, "Unfortunately, there is little information about what students know and how they perceive [a] service delivery mode" (p. 218). Jenkins and Heinen (1989) relate: "As far as we can tell, no one has conducted a systematic inquiry into students' preferences for different types of assistance" (p. 517). Students need to be consulted, they comment, "because it is hazardous to assume that children necessarily 'see it our way'"(p. 523). Albinger (1995) also relates that children are "rarely asked or told about the educational decisions that are made on their behalf" (p. 615). Echoing this point, Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1993) note a reason for not inquiring of individuals with LD may be that "decision-makers are often self-appointed 'representatives' of the learning disabled constituency" (p. 115).

Schools' Placements for Students with Disabilities

Schools are changing to less restrictive placements and much more in-classroom placement for students with disabilities (Mcleskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1999), acknowledging that that is closer to what is "normal" for all children and that school, itself, is an important benchmark for students as they interpret their own normalcy (Barga, 1996). While it is noted that "rarely are the perceptions of students themselves systematically sought out to build the case for changing the way instruction is organized" (Pugach & Wesson, 1995, pp. 280-281), there is some literature surveying the perceptions that students with disabilities do have.

There is evidence that students with disabilities prefer classroom assistance to separate assistance from a special educator (Jenkins, & Heinen, 1989). Students comment that the

classroom teachers "know what I need" (p. 522) and they "would rather receive help from the classroom teacher" than a separate specialist (p. 522). Guterman (1995) describes students' comments as reflecting "a majority stated that they would have preferred receiving help with the general education classroom," albeit from a special education teacher--feeling that this separate attention from special educators would "draw attention to students having academic difficulty and would lead to increased academic stigma" (p. 120). Potentially, students report, it would be preferable to receive separate services but not under a special education "label" and making the special education curriculum more challenging and relevant (Guterman, 1995, p. 120). Yet, one must acknowledge that the extant literature reports differences of opinion about the value of special education--for some feel that special education only has them "play games " or teaches them "things they already know" (Gresch, 1995, p. 168).

Jenkins and Heinen (1989) summarize, " Most students prefer to obtain additional help within the general education classroom from nonspecialists who are familiar to them and their classroom curriculum" (p. 523). Reid and Button (1995) add, "They want to spend more time in general education classrooms" (p. 610). It needs to be noted, though, that students' delivery mode is influenced by the delivery mode they are receiving (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). Students receiving pull-out assistance preferred that, and students receiving in-class assistance preferred that. Age, also, was a factor, as older students preferred out-of-class assistance, though the authors acknowledge students' perceptions are subject to the way they envision services different from what they are receiving (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989).

On the other hand, the data on preferences varies by the exceptionality, for Leone, Luttig, Zlotlow, and Trickett (1990) remind us that "very little data examining... student satisfaction in programs for behaviorally disordered youth exist" (p. 55). And there are variances even in the data that do exist, for Kearns (1992) reports that, among high school students, more students perceive the special education program to be "effective" than they do other school programs.

Special Education Students' Placement Preferences

General education classrooms. There is some variation in the placement preferences that have been found. Lerner (1997) notes that most students with learning disabilities receive their education either totally in regular classrooms or in combination with a resource room. In regard to whether students would prefer going to a resource room or having the special education teacher come to their classroom, Albinger (1995) found "the most prevalent reply was having the resource specialist come to their room. [Students] believed this model would be best because they would not miss so much of their regular classroom work" (p. 620) and other classroom events. Both general classroom students and students with LD suggest that team-taught classes using both classroom and special education teachers would meet both academic and social needs (Pugach & Wesson, 1995), and classroom peers also assert that they would go to the special education teacher for help (Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 1995).

Something more than mere placement in a classroom is regarded as being needed to assure that students feel like they are members of the classroom. Simply being in classes with other students did not increase contact among the students or increase relational bonds. Students commented that they were more pleased with their placement when they also participated in after-school activities and formed at least some friendships. Students who found teachers expecting the most from them academically were often also the happiest about their social lives (Asch, 1989).

Advantages of such an approach so that students remain in the same classroom as peers are reported to be the assistance students receive from teachers, teachers knowing them, and the opportunities to have classmates as friends. Teachers have been described as caring, responsive, approachable, and helpful. Students with LD have noted that they did not feel awkward, embarrassed, or singled out. In sum, they "felt they knew more, learned faster, remembered better, read more, got more done, and did more things" (Dyches, Egan, Young, Ingram, Gibb, & Allred, 1996, p. 19). Further, the classroom is acknowledged as contributing to the students' success outside of the classroom (Lightbourne-Bartley, 1991). Classroom placement is also reported to have positive effects on self-esteem and self-worth, with more time to make

friendships, and increased instructional time because students do not have to leave to travel to other special education sites (Klingner, 1998).

Some of the specific aspects of being in the classroom that are regarded as being important by identified special education students are the importance of having the same textbooks as everyone else (Ware, in press), though this finding is not consistent (Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997). Students have noted a preference for having the same tests (Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, & Daugherty, 1993) and same homework as everyone else (Nelson, Epstein, Bursock, Jayanthi, & Sawyer, 1998). "Receiving the same homework is important because students need to be able to call their friends and ask them about the homework" (Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, & Gordon, 1993, p. 99). Classroom adaptations which might be acceptable include adapting pacing of assignments and flexible grouping practices (Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997; Schumm & Vaughn, 1994), though students are even uncertain about classroom adaptations--some students feeling that adaptations "single them out and underscore their inadequacies in academic tasks" (Schumm, Vaughn, & Saumell, 1992, p. 483). And there is reliable evidence that students are perceptive of differences in teachers' treatment of students within the classroom, with nature of treatment corresponding to the teachers' expectations (Weinstein, 1983).

Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, and Gordon (1993) comment that classroom teachers may feel less comfortable with special education students in their classrooms because of what they term a "Robin Hood" effect--"the effort it takes to concentrate on students with special needs robs average and high achievers of appropriate instruction" (p. 89). However, they note, "Teachers' concerns about the Robin Hood effect may be ill founded" (p. 99). "High achieving students do not perceive that when teachers make adaptations their learning opportunities are being 'robbed' so that poorer students can learn" (p. 115).

On the other hand, some students have reported that classroom teachers were less than helpful, and even denied them the right to leave class to receive resource room assistance--simply accusing them of being lazy and claiming they could achieve if they worked harder. Other negative classroom experiences these students reported included repeated punishment for not completing

work on time, retention in a grade, and cruel treatment by peers and teachers (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997; Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 1995). Yet other students related that, if they did leave the classroom for resource room services, classroom teachers refused to help them with work they missed while they were out of the room (Albinger, 1995; Reid & Button, 1995), and students felt that, when leaving the classroom, they missed "a lot of stuff" (Pugach & Wesson, 1995, p. 287). Additionally, students indicate that classroom teachers rarely adjusted curricula, instruction, or requirements to accommodate their individual needs (Guterman, 1995; Klingner, 1998), and students with LD prefer general education classroom teachers who make adaptations for their needs (Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997; Vaughn, Schumm, & Kouzekanani, 1993). In addition to the classroom itself, some students have reported the playground as a negative experience (Lewis, 1995).

Reactions to the classroom may vary with different exceptionalities. For example, students with hearing impairments declare that there are no interactions between themselves and other students in classes (Mertens & Kluwin, 1986). Students with hearing impairments do desire these interactions and regret the lack of contribution to their own social development (Stinson, Whitmire, & Kluwin, 1996). Further, students with hearing impairments are reported to use a variety of strategies to deceive teachers into believing they were coping with their work when, in reality, they were not. These strategies included hiding hearing aids, copying the work of other pupils, nodding and smiling at teachers in order to "pretend to understand," refusing to ask for help, and "playing the fool" in order to appear "naughty" rather than "stupid" (Lynas, 1986, p. 32). A dilemma given, then, to classroom teachers is that students with hearing impairments particularly disliked having attention drawn to themselves; they did not like to ask for special help nor did they welcome too much unsolicited attention. On the other hand, they expressed warm views about being in classrooms. They appreciated being in a "normal" environment which prepared them for life in a hearing-speaking society (Lynas, 1986).

Interestingly, students with LD have also reported some similar "passing" behaviors to avoid the disclosure of the disability and make it through school (Barga, 1996). These include

waiting for the hallway to clear before changing to the next class, hiding elementary primer books they had to carry, purposely missing the first word of a spelling bee, copying others' work, and becoming the class clown.

Overall, students report mixed messages about their classroom experiences. While some report, "Everything is going as good as it can get. Some of my teachers are teachers and friends" (Butler & Boscardin, 1997, p. 31), Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1997) found that "it was not unusual to hear remarks [from students with LD] about simply hating school" (p. 37). The theme of frustration has been consistent (Reid & Button, 1995; Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1997). Yet the mixed feelings were evident. One student responded, "I'd tell my best teacher, 'Thank you for taking the time to get me where I am.' I'd tell my worst teacher to get another job" (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1997, p. 159). It is certainly possible, therefore, that some students experience what Reid and Button (1995) summarize as students' report of "feeling isolated, victimized, and betrayed... misunderstanding and devaluing their experiences in school" (p. 608). In fact, "students repeatedly reported feeling what is more accurately labeled as oppression, it its political sense" (p. 608).

Special education. Students' reports about special education services are often negative. Reis, Neu and McGuire (1997) found some students with LD reporting their special education experiences with a high degree of variability each year, with different teachers, no clear program, and a lack of coherence--seeming to be geared to lower-ability students with much repetition year-by-year. Some students characterized programs as "scattered, unclear, and disorganized" (p. 471). Students with LD do not feel that their special education program helped them substantially academically, often reporting the "lack of challenging curriculum" (Guterman, 1995, p. 119). In fact, many students with LD assert that they see little relation between their subsequent accomplishments and the educational services, special and otherwise, that they had received (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1997). Guterman (1995) interprets that special education teachers, while attempting to encourage their students, may inadvertently contribute to learned helplessness by attempting to coax students to do work.

Students report their dissatisfaction with the stigma resulting from special education identification. Students report that their special education label could be positive, "when it made sense out of their academic struggles and involved getting help" (Barga, 1996, p. 415). Yet there were definite negative aspects when it "created conditions of being set apart from peers or receiving differential treatment from others' (Barga, 1996, p. 415). Stigma was evidenced by name calling, accusations, and low academic expectations from both peers and teachers (Barga, 1996). They were unhappy and worried about losing their friends when told they would have to leave classes for special education--feeling that there is a definite stigma about being pulled out (Barga, 1996). At the same time, students felt mainstream peers inferred they were less capable than other classroom students (Guterman, 1995; Reid & Button, 1995), but students with LD felt like they were doing grade-level material (Pugach & Wesson, 1995). Even with the embarrassment attached to labels and placement, many felt they would be learning more in regular classes--though acknowledging being grateful to special education teachers (Brantlinger, 1994).

Brantlinger's (1994) report of 18 adolescents classified as needing special education found that 2 were extremely positive about special education, and 5 were ambivalent--the others essentially negative. One student commented that special education might be necessary, but "I wish I didn't have to be in it" (p. 395) and another said, "I used to hate it. Now I just don't think about it" (p. 396). Preferences also differed by socio-economic status, with the majority of low-income students being negative about special education. Generally, the longer students received special education, the more negative their views. One of the most prominent of their views was the teasing, rejection, and stereotyping that resulted from being associated with special education. Therefore, Brantlinger (1994) comments, students do not regard special education as being protective of the negative responses of others, though students did make positive comments about caring special education teachers.

In contrast, students with ED/BD may acknowledge the need for a separate special education placement as the change agent for their lives (Lightbourne-Bartley, 1991). Such

students may be more aware of the social dimensions in school and may be more affected by aspects of their social environment than other students (Leone, Luttig, Zlotlow, & Trickett, 1990).

Special education resource rooms. Yet other students have indicated the preference of a special education resource room in which students receive special assistance for only a portion of the school day. Vaughn and Bos (1987) found primary level students with LD indicating they would more prefer to spend time in a resource room than in the classroom--and it was a "moderately attractive" alternative for non-LD students as well (p. 221). These authors interject, though, that primary level students did not report an accurate information about the resource room--though intermediate elementary students did. Klingner (1998) reviews several studies to find that, while students' responses varied, the majority of students with high incidence disabilities prefer to receive specialized instruction outside of the regular classroom for part of the school day.

Specifically, Vaughn and Klingner (1998) found intermediate-age elementary students with learning disabilities preferred resource room support to inclusive or in-class support. The responses from primary and secondary students, however, were more mixed. Of those who indicated a preference for the resource room, students felt they learned more, received extra help, had fun activities and easier work, and the resource room was quieter. Comparably, Padeliado and Zigmond (1996) reported that most elementary students stated they liked going to special education because of the extra help they got there--though one-third said it was because of the treats or games and reinforcements. They did express concern about what they might be missing academically while they were out of the classroom. Positives expressed about the classroom were that making friends was easier, there was a negative stigma associated with going to the resource room, students could be in the classroom the entire day, and the classroom teacher responded to them favorably (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). While students with LD have been found to acknowledge that resource services may be a boon to achievement, inclusion in the classroom is a clear choice to have more friends (Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998). Whinnery, King, Evans, and Gable (1995) found elementary students with LD reporting the LD teacher helps them

get better grades and get along with other students, and even students in collaborative classes may prefer separate resource room assistance.

Students at the secondary level, however, had mixed feelings because of "negative stigma they perceived to be associated with going" (Klingner, 1998, p. 2). Middle school students have also been found to prefer classrooms where, they thought, it was easier to make friends and they could, in fact, learn more (McNellis, Kilgore, & Webb, 1996)

The comment about work in the resource room being easier than the classroom re-occurred in several studies. Ware (in press) found students complaining, "They didn't give us work like everyone else got" (p. 4). A confirming statement included from one student was, "Mrs. Albinger, if you make me keep coming to resource, I'll be a bum on the street. All the bums out there went to resource!" (Albinger, 1995, p. 621).

Self-contained special education classrooms. Self-contained special education classes have also been criticized by students who have learning disabilities, feeling that such classes were primarily populated by students with mental retardation and students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Students found the self-contained class experience was degrading, resulting in such a student comment as, "I believed I was just plain dumb" (Reis, Neu, & Mcguire, 1997, p. 470).

Students who have mental retardation, however, have differences based on age, with younger children viewing such placement much more favorably, decreasing to less than 20% of high school students viewing it favorably (Warner, Thrapp, & Walsh, 1973). Also in the 1970s, Jones determined that special class placement was "categorically rejected" by junior and senior high school students. (Jones, 1974, p. 27). This was echoed in the MacMillan, Widaman, Balow, and Little (1992) study. Students made reference to similar points regarding labels and stigma alluded to above. While there were aspects of their schooling that they regarded positively, students also comment that their class work was too simple and babyish and that it fostered over-reliance on the teacher. Students were less inclined than their integrated counterparts to say, "My teacher makes me work hard" (Wade & Moore, 1993, p. 32). In a study of students with LD 67% rated self-

contained classroom negatively--one student reporting, "I did everything possible to miss school or come late" (Schneider, 1984, p. 534).

Yet, positive aspects of special education experiences were felt to be that they were more useful in preparing for life (Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985).

Students with hearing impairments note that classes for these students have less work and less difficult work than mainstream classes--though they do not indicate whether this is more positive or negative (Mertens & Kluwin, 1986). Stinson, Whitmire, and Kluwin (1996) also found these students indicating a preference for separate classes.

Special education residential schools.

Totally separate special school placements are regarded differently by different exceptionalities. Students who are deaf tend to be more positive about their special high school experiences than are students who were in mainstream schools (Foster, 1989). Those who had been in mainstream schools describe their social life in terms of "loneliness, rejection, and social isolation" (p. 44; Asch, 1989). Obstacles to academic and social integration in mainstream schools, described by students who were deaf, ranged from inadequate support services to teachers and classmates who were unaware of or unresponsive to their special communication needs (Foster, 1989). Difficulties with personal and social interactions are echoed by Stinson, Whitmire, and Kluwin (1996). Social segregation often resulted in feelings of inferiority, fear of the "normal," and apprehension beyond the world of school (Asch, 1989, p. 191). Mertens (1986), though, found that residential school students described their experiences as positive based on teachers' abilities to sign, socializing with friends, and participating in after-school activities.

Summary and Implications

This review began by investigating research and other literature regarding special education students' perceptions and preferences for placement. Would they prefer placement in the same classes as age-mates, partial experiences in those classrooms and also in separate special education resource rooms, or in distinctively separate classrooms or even separate schools? The first discovery was the lack of substantial research exploring students' preferences at all, not only those

of students with special education needs. Indeed, one often encountered such words as "paucity" or "dearth" in reference to literature exploring students' opinions and preferences.

There is, however, an increasing need to investigate students' preferences. One argument would be the recommendation in earlier federal regulations on the advisability to include students. New federal special education legislation increases the times of student input. Continuing controversies regarding special education students' placements and inclusion also argue for considering students' preferences. Deliberations over inclusion's benefits and rigors would profit from the input of those who are recipients of inclusion decisions.

A persuasive argument for seeking students' opinions is not only the legal need but the substantial professional opinion about the value of seeking students' opinions at all. Arguments have been made that knowledge of student preferences will positively affect teachers' practices, their approach to students who have learning difficulties, and school climate. Students' motivation and interest are likely to increase as well as their participation. Students' positive interactions could also increase, resulting in fewer conflicts. It has been noted that students do actively perceive teachers' interactions and approaches in the classroom, and they do have preferences about those interactions and approaches (e.g. Vaughn, Schumm, Niarhos, & Daugherty, 1993). Students are perceptive of teachers' classroom practices (e.g. Gordon, 1993; Weinstein, 1983). And special education students' preferences are likely to be related to a program's success (Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 1995). Some have even noted that students whose preferences are different from practices they observe in place may work to sabotage those practices (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992).

Thus, any the success of any program options for special education students is likely to find key determinants to be preferences of students, themselves (Whinnery, King, Evans, & Gable, 1995). Nevertheless, at the present time we find students' opinions to be requested only rarely. Instead, adults--primarily professionals--make decisions for the students and, we presume, act on their behalf. Data , however, do not support this presumption (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1995).

What has been discovered is that generally students with special education needs vastly prefer general education classroom placement to any form of separateness. Students generally report reluctances about leaving the classroom (Klingner, 1998), though they do perceive advantages to receiving the assistance of special educator help within the classroom (Pugach & Wesson, 1995).

Even though the general education classroom might be a preference, there is also a substantial body of literature where students report lack of attention to their special needs or even negative teacher and age-mate interactions (e.g. Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997). In comparison, special education resource room and classroom settings have been viewed as "scattered, unclear, and disorganized" (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997), simply playing games (Gresch, 1995), or, simply, "easy" (Miller & Fritz, 1998).

It must be acknowledged that some groups of students with specific exceptionalities have clear preferences or see advantages to a separate special education approach including students with hearing impairments (Foster, 1989; Mertens & Kluwin, 1986), some students with emotional disturbance/behavior disorders (Lightbourne-Bartley, 1991), and intermediate-age students with learning disabilities (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). And, Jenkins and Heinen's (1989) observation may hold true that students' preferences are influenced by whichever placements they have experienced.

The primary implication to be drawn from this review is that inquiry must be made of students' placement preferences. There is simply too much literature describing the ill effects which can result of not making that inquiry. With only few exceptions, the inquiries that have been made have found special education students preferring placement in the same classrooms as their age-mates, though they readily acknowledge some of the disadvantages which can result if teachers and classmates are not receptive to their learning and performance differences.

Federal law and interpretations advise including students in the decision-making process--particularly when students are old enough to have such decision-making rights transfer to them from their parents. However, there is but little literature describing approaches to including

students in this decision-making process in a fully participatory way (cf. Bos & Vaughn 1994). If inquiries are to be made of students about placement preferences, then ways will need to be found which describe alternatives understandably and which assure an environment which students feel will be open to hearing their perspectives.

Yet another implication relates to preparation programs for teachers and other professionals. This review has often referred to the limited literature reviewing students' perceptions and preferences. While preparation programs must acknowledge the paucity of literature, they do need to convince teachers and others about the value of hearing and responding to students' own preferences.

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